

In Response, I Swear, part one: Learning

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Summary: Relei leads a rebellion with help from Ryo... can there be survival in their new hope?

## 1. Default Chapter Title

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In Response, I Swear, part one: Learning

The girl brushed a black braid over her shoulder and watched the fight below.

"So you're the one," she said softly, her attention flitting to a red armored boy in the middle of protecting a young woman from the armored soldiers around them. "I would have never thought..." She trailed off with a small laugh. "It's funny how the world works." Suddenly, an errant soldier leapt at the woman. A growl began in the girl's throat, but she suppressed it and put her focus into the small orb around her neck. The red jacket and black jeans gave way to a white and red sub armor. "I was created to fight the Dynasty," she murmured, stepping onto the ledge. "This is nothing compared to what I've faced. But my life depends on her. She must *\*not\** die."

Chapter 1(Ryo)

My katana ripped through a soldier, then another took its place. Sage yelled something at the same time I heard a clatter of armor behind me. Mia screamed, then was silent before I could turn. Fear clutched in my throat. What... if she was dead?

"Watch your own back, Wildfire," said a new voice. "I'll watch hers." I sliced through the second soldier and turned quickly. I saw a flash of black hair, then they were both gone. A few seconds later, they reappeared on top of a truck. Mia looked as stunned as I felt. The girl had on a sub armor *\*exactly\** like mine. Three soldiers leapt onto the trailer and she regarded them coolly. "Don't test me, Dynasty trash. I'm not having a good day." They didn't believe her

and lunged. She kicked one of them back into the other two and they all collapsed on the ground, run through with the third one's spear. "Well, I told you so. Watch yourselves, not me!" she yelled. "You're in the middle of a battle, Ronins. That's not a smart idea." I turned my attention back to the soldiers and finished off the last of them.

"Relei!" shouted another voice. She swore to herself and lifted her head. Four more girls in black landed around her. "It's time to come home, Ree. This is insane. You can't change the future," finished the blonde one.

"Wanna bet, Synder?" she shot back, her sub armor fading to black jeans and red jacket over a black T-shirt. "We've done our part to save the world. Not that we were ever thanked in anyway. The war's over and we've been forgotten. Live with it." She helped Mia down and gave me a small smile. "I told you: I'll watch her. You could've been killed. Next time, trust me, okay?"

"You really think saving her will change it?" asked a girl with light red hair. "You know it won't."

"And? I'm still supposed to protect the innocent. That's my mission, Synder. That's the only reason I was created. The war was a side effect. Trent, Karya, so don't you start too." One with light blue hair raised her hands in defeat, then laughed.

"You know I'd never go against you, leader," she said. "But you need to stop this. You'll be killed, or worse. You can call your sub armor, but what about your armor armor? It's already being used." She gestured towards us. "All of them are."

"What is she talking about?" asked Rowen. I shrugged and so did Relei.

"I left the gate open wide enough to get ours through. Dr. H thought of that before I left."

"That is the dumbest-" started the last girl. Then she paused. "Dr. H sent you on this insanity trip?" Relei nodded.

"You bet, Karya. She's been watching us, even after the war. She knows we're all but non existent to the people of Earth and the rest of the galaxy." Okay, this was getting really weird. Who was Dr. H? And who were these girls, for that matter?

"Listen, we're standing here talking about things that shouldn't be talked about in the open," said Synder. "We need to go somewhere else. See ya', Ronins." They disappeared and Sage gave what sounded like a sigh.

"I'm getting a headache," he muttered. "Who were they?"

"Like I know," I said. "But whoever they were, they saved Mia's life."

## Chapter 2(Relei)

"This is mutinee," I mused, collapsing on the couch in the hotel room. "I came here to give us a better life in the future."

"And instead you make us all look insane," said Trent, dropping her dark blue jacket onto the chair. "I still can't believe Dr. H sent you. I thought she of all people would try and \*stop\* you."

"There's nothing to be afraid of, in actuality," said Synder. "We're here, in twentieth century Toyama, we have enough of that crap to last us for a year and we get to meet the Ronin Warriors of the past. I call it an upside."

"And the downside is we have no idea how long we'll be here. What if it's longer then a year?" asked Seraan. "We won't survive."

"We'll be fine," said Karya. "But you know what's really awful? Torrent's cuter in person." I threw up my hands in frustration.

"And you all call me insane," I murmured. "So now what? I'm not leaving, no matter what you say, but we can't spend all our time in a hotel room. Not to mention we probably should introduce ourselves to the Ronins."

"Why?" asked Trent. "They know we're here. Isn't that enough? What if they figure it out?"

"Figure what out?" I asked. "There's nothing to figure out. We don't technically exist yet and sooner or later, it will come down to fighting with them against the Dynasty, so we might as well."

"You know exactly what they might figure out," scolded Synder. "And we can't let them."

"What if they do?" wondered Seraan. "Then what?"

"Whoa whoa whoa," I said. "Take this one step at a time. First, we meet the Ronins. Then, if they do learn what we are, we'll devise a plan, okay? This is the first time in months we've had a break and I personally want to enjoy it." Seraan grinned slyly as I picked up my backpack. "Coming, fish girl? I was assuming you'd want to go swimming too."

"You betcha."

### Chapter 3

I stirred the ice with my straw. Where was he? I knew he was supposed to come down here with Mia sometime soon and I had already been in town an hour. Much longer then I would have wished.

The door opened and both of them walked in, laughing about something. I lowered my head as they sat down at a table nearby. I tuned out the rest of the conversations around me and put all of my focus into theirs.

"Did Sage say anything about his headache?" asked Mia.

"Only for an hour," he laughed. "What do you think? Do you think they came from the Dynasty?"

"I doubt it. That one girl, Seraan, said something about their armors already being in use. I wonder... maybe they're the future Ronins."

You gotta give the woman credit. It hadn't even been a day since we had met them(sort of) and she already had secret number one down. I just hoped she couldn't get numbers two through a thousand.

"Was everything alright?" I jolted back to reality and my hand knocked over my glass. It spilled onto the floor and shattered. So much for my not being noticed. "Oh, I'm sorry," she said bending down to pick it up. I leaned over to help and a shard sliced my hand. Blood welled up and I jerked back. Oh, not good.

"Are you okay?" asked Mia. I looked over her shoulder at Wildfire and his eyes widened in shock.

"You," he mouthed. I shook my head and pressed the cut tightly. Please, let the stuff kick in...

"I'll be fine," I said, standing up. My legs threatened to collapse beneath me, but I had been trained better then to let that happen. At that same moment, Trent was walking past the door, talking with Strata. She glanced in and gasped. I saw her hand go into her coat pocket and then everything went dark.

#### Chapter 4(Trent)

I pulled the small bottle out of my pocket just as Relei went down. Her jacket was already soaked with blood and it was getting worse. Damn it! She must have cut it pretty deeply.

"What happened?" asked Mia. The entire restaurant was pretty much with the same question and I had no way to explain it. So I dumped the liquid into Ree's mouth and held the cut closed. Slowly but surely, it stopped and I sighed gratefully.

"Help me get her up," I said. "Relei, come on girl, don't quit on me now." She groaned and opened her eyes slowly.

"Wha- what? Trent?"

"Chill, it's okay. Don't do that to me, got it?" She licked her lips and grimaced.

"What did you do? Give me the entire week's worth?" she said in disgust. "I hate that stuff."

"You'd rather I let you bleed to death?"

"No, not really." She smiled. "I'm sorry. I screwed up."

"No, not really," I mocked.

"Maybe... someone should call a doctor," said Strata.

"No!" we both said in unison. Then more gently, I added "No. That's not an option. We need to get her outside. I'm sorry about the mess," I said to the waitress, who looked pale at the sight of the blood. "We'll send you a check for the clean up."

"And the lunch," said Relei. She stood up and took a uncertain step forward. I caught her arm and helped her out the door. "I have a headache," she muttered. "Thanks Trent. I owe you."

"You saved my butt a lot during the war. Not to mention we're at a loss without you to lead us."

"Don't start with me, Trent," she growled. I let her arm fall and she leaned against the wall. "That is the dumbest thing I've ever done."

"What about the time-"

"Okay, okay, yeah, that was dumber." She grinned as Wildfire, Strata, and Mia walked up to us. "Hello."

"Str-" I started, then stopped. "Rowen, meet Relei, our leader. Relei, meet Rowen of the Strata."

What... just happened?" he asked.

"It's complicated," she explained. Just then, Synder shouted from across the street. Her, Karya, and Seraan came across the street, dragging Halo, Hardrock, and Torrent with them.

"What the heck happened?" asked Seraan. "You look like you ran into a warlord in a dark alley again." Relei shivered visibly.

"Never again. That was the worst thing I've ever done."

"And the dumbest," I spoke up. She laughed, then rubbed her temples.

"Headache?" asked Halo. She just nodded.

"We need to talk to you, all of you," she said after a moment. "First of all-"

"Not here," broke in Synder. "There might be... people listening." She lifted her gaze up and I knew in an instant who she was talking about. Anashi Zero-Six. At that moment, I heard a light chuckle.

"\*So\* observant, Zero-Two. And what are you planning on telling them exactly? Who you \*really\* are? I doubt it."

"Don't doubt what you don't know, Anashi," said Relei coolly, standing up. "Do you really want to fight right now, or are you simply being a pest?"

"You know me," she said as she jumped off of the fire escape. She wasn't fully armored, thankfully and she had a wicked smile on her face. "Poor, poor Relei. Does it hurt?"

"Shut up, Anashi," she sneered. "I don't have time for your games. Go away." Anashi rolled her eyes, but vanished with a sneer.

"Have it your way. I was going to ask you join the Dynasty and be free of your miserable life, but it's apparently not a good time." Relei swore loudly at her.

"I'll never join you and your Dynasty. You know that!" she shouted angrily. I touched her arm and she took a deep breath. "She's a pain,

but a warlord none the less," she muttered.

"A warlord?" asked Rowen. "Her?" Relei blinked calmly, walked over to him and gave him a full glare.

"Is that a problem?" she asked, jabbing her finger into his chest. "She's incredibly strong and I doubt even \*you\* can take her. But you're welcome to try." I sighed and pulled her back by her shoulders.

"Calm down, Ree. He didn't mean anything, it was just a question. Anashi \*is\* a warlord, but she's from our time, not yours. That's why you don't know her and why she seems to think she can get us to join the Dynasty."

"But what Ana doesn't understand is that fact that we're not evil," said Seraan. "We weren't created to be. It's not in our blood."

"I'm gonna strangle that... that..." Relei trailed off. "Come on. Our hotel's near here and we really should talk. Especially now that Anashi's here. You know Kina, Deri, and Suin won't be far beyond." The other three warlords: Suin Zero-Seven, Kina Zero-Eight, and Deri Zero-Nine. As strength goes, Anashi's the most powerful, but they're all \*complete\* bitches, so it balances out.

## Chapter 5 (Rowen)

By the time we reached their hotel, Relei looked a lot better, but my chest still hurt.

"Sorry," she said quietly as Synder dug around for her key. "I shouldn't have been so..."

"Mean?" interjected Seraan. "Evil, cruel, contemptuous, um, wretched, despicable-"

"We get the idea, Ser," said Trent, shoving her through the door. "Move it, kid. I'm really resenting that Christmas gift."

"Which one?"

"All of them, at the moment. Relei, you should go get cleaned up. You're a mess."

"What was your first clue?" She disappeared into the bathroom and reappeared a few minutes later to grab her backpack. "Don't say anything yet, got it?" she whispered to Karya. "Wait until I get back."

"No prob," said Karya. "Do you have anything against getting something to eat?"

"Food?" asked Kento. Relei shook her head sadly and shut the door tightly. Karya shrugged.

"Guess not. Come on, Synder. You're helping."

"Karya," she said as they walked into the hallway. "There's a reason you're Zero-Four."

"Zero-Four?" asked Kento silently. I shrugged.

"Hey Relei!" said Trent, knocking on the door. "Can we at least tell them our names?"

"Go ahead! Why should I care?" she asked, coming back out. Her hair was brushed and hanging loose on her shoulders and she wore a simple red T-shirt with black jeans. "I'm Relei Sanada Zero-One."

"Seraan Mori Zero-Two."

"I'm Trent Hashiba Zero-Five."

"What do those numbers mean?" asked Ryo. Relei shook her head.

"No way. First, you tell us who \*you\* are. We know you by your armors, and that won't get us far."

"I'm Ryo Sanada."

"Cye Mori."

"Kento Rei Faun."

"Sage Date."

"Rowen Hashiba." Relei gathered her hair into a band and smiled as Synder and Karya walked in. Karya tossed her a bag of chips and a candy bar.

"Sorry it's not those freeze dried things you eat, but it's almost the same," she said.

"Potato chips and a Snickers bar are slightly different then apple chips," said Relei. "And I just had lunch. I'm not a black hole like you Karya." She dropped the food onto the table. "Meet Karya Rei Faun Zero-Four and Synder Date Zero-Three."

"You still haven't explained what those mean," said Ryo. Seraan opened her mouth, then shut it and nodded towards Relei.

"I think it's your turn." Relei nodded and sat on the edge of the couch.

"About thirty years into the future, technology is seriously more advanced. But, unfortunately, there is a war. It involves the Dynasty and \*four\* new warlords. No one knows what happened to the others, but the new ones- Anashi, Kina, Deri, and Suin- are twice as strong and twice as evil."

"So you're the Ronins of the future," said Cye. "That doesn't explain some things, like why are you here?"

"Let her finish, will ya?" asked Synder.

"The warlords are clones, plain and simple," continued Relei. "They were created by a company called Interspace Labs. Even if we don't know what happened to Kayura, Dais, Kale, and Sekhmet, we know that the new ones are their clones."

"Clones?" asked Mia. "She \*did\* look like Kayura."

"The war was started by them and their new form of the Dynasty. In the first battle, the Ronins were caught off guard... and destroyed." Trent swore and bit her bottom lip. Even Karya looked away.

"No matter how many times I have to hear that," she murmured. "It still hurts knowing the soul reason we were created was because of the death of heroes." I realized what they were saying. In the future, we were dead. But somehow, it wasn't such a problem. Everyone dies and we ran a greater risk, being Ronin Warriors. Then something else hit me.

"Created?" I asked slowly. "Then you're..." Relei nodded grimly.

"We're clones too. Yours, specifically." Seraan jumped up, just now listening to the conversation.

"I thought you said we wouldn't tell them!" she said angrily. Relei got up and glared at her.

"You're questioning my judgment, Seraan?"

"No, I'm questioning your sanity. They shouldn't have to know!"

"Look around you, Seraan! The warlords are here! How long do you think they'll keep it a secret themselves?! Anashi's probably waiting for the right moment to say it out loud, catch us all off guard, like in the middle of a battle. She's done it before, she'll do it again, only this time, it won't just be us that get hurt!" Trent laid her hand on Relei's shoulder. "Leave me alone, Trent," she said coldly, walking out onto the balcony. The door slammed shut, then Seraan muttered something and left through the other door.

"Not again," groaned Karya. "Those two are at each others throats every damn day. Why can't they get along?"

"I give it an hour," said Synder. "They fight like leopards, but it doesn't last long." Still, I got up and walked outside. I didn't see her at first until I heard a small sniff. I turned back around and saw her sitting on the rail, leaning against the wall.

"I shouldn't have said anything," she murmured. "Seraan's right. There wasn't any real reason to tell you. But Anashi... she'll use anything to win. Even \*that\*."

"So whose clone are you?" I asked gently. She gave me a weak smile and I realized she looked a lot like-

"Wild- Ryo, I mean. That's going to take some getting used to. We were raised knowing only the names of the armors, not the people who wore them." She shifted her gaze and stared over at town. We were pretty high up, so it was a nice view. Then she barked a laugh. "Saha would love this. Dr. H too."

"Saha? Dr. H?"

"Saha is her son and Dr. H is the scientist who created us. She's



also the one that sent me here. The others followed on their own. I had hoped they would but now... Trent was the only one I was truly worried about."

"Why her?"

"She's very close with Saha. If anything happened to him because of what we do to change the future, she'd fall apart. We almost lost him before and it was hard getting her to fight again, especially after... rrrgghh, I could kill Anashi. She turned Saha against us and his own mother too. Now he fights for the Dynasty."

"Is... does Talpa exist in you world?"

"No," she said, shaking her head. "Thankfully, he doesn't. Anashi tried to bring him back, but... she was stopped. The warlords fight together, even if power does occasionally go to their heads." Another laugh shook her hair loose again. "That's their greatest weakness and we have no way of using it against them."

"Do you think they've teamed up with the Dynasty here?"

"Think isn't the word," she answered. "I know they have. And it's going to be twice as hard for all of us now. Anashi's Black Soldiers are as strong as any soldier now, but they're three times faster. Kina's Brown are faster than the Black, but weaker in power and Deri's Red have strength to spare, but slower than a rock. Suin's Green are really the weakest, but they can overpower in large numbers. Put them with the soldiers now, who have strength, speed \*and\* numbers- we've got a problem." She finished abruptly, leaning over and looking down.

"That's obvious."

"No, I'm serious. Anashi's down there, with six others. You're warlords too, I'm guessing. Seraan... oh no, Seraan!" She jumped off the railing and ran back inside. "Move it, guys. Ana's up to something and Seraan's on her own." Her clothes gave way the her sub armor as Karya headed for the door. "Karya, there \*is\* a quicker way." Karya's grin was an exact copy of Kento's when he knew that were going for a fight and the one he was wearing right then.

"Don't I know it. Come on." She and Relei jumped up onto the railing and shared a smile. Then they both disappeared over the edge and Synder and Trent followed.

"Can I say something?" asked Sage, his sub armor appearing. "They're exactly like us, aren't they?"

## Chapter 6(Synder)

Don't ask me why Seraan and Relei acted like they did. We weren't clones of each other, after all.

Relei and Karya jumped off of the balcony and Trent and I went down after them. Seraan was our friend too and I wasn't about to let her get herself killed over a stupid argument.

"Armors?" I asked, landing a kick in a Black soldier. Relei shook her head.

"No. We do this without them. Save your strength. If Anashi actually shows up, we'll have a real battle on our hands."

"Need help?" asked Sage, landing next to me. It was definitely a trip seeing the Halo sub armor on him too, but what can ya' do? These things happen in time travel.

"Sure, why not?" I responded with a grin. Three reds dove for us and were a blur as they caught him around the waist. "I don't think so," I said. I grabbed one of them by the leg and swung him into another. Sage knocked the other one away, a cut on his lip. "These things are a pain in the-" I was cut off by a regular Dynasty soldier slamming into my from behind.

"Synder!" shouted Trent as I ran into her. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, nothing broken. Or cut for that matter." She smiled wryly and kicked over a pair of Greens. "I swear, these things get more annoying."

"As do you, Halo." I growled and Kina appeared, followed by Kale. "Interesting to finally see both of the Halo's in one place."

"You're gonna see my fist in a minute," I threatened. The barrage of soldiers lessened, leaving only the warlords and us. "Where's Seraan?"

"Torrent? She's fine. Suin and Sekhmet are... talking with her."

"If she dies, I swear, I'll kill you all," said Relei. "Where's Anashi?"

"Here, Relei. You want to fight me?"

"Do I ever. Armor of Wildfire! Dao Jin!"

"Dao Chi!" I called. We weren't going to get very far fighting them in our sub armors, now were we? And I was planning to kick Kina's face in.

"Dao Gi!" yelled Karya

"Dao Inochi!" shouted Trent. Power rushed through me and I lunged for Kina, nodaochi raised.

"Fight me, Kina!" I shouted. She dodged and our swords connected. "I'll teach you to turn my friends."

"Ah, I see," she said coolly. "You're still angry about Saha H-"

"Of course I am," I broke in. "Saha was my best friend. Thunder Bolt-"

"Black Lightning-"

"CUT!"

"SLASH!" The energy wove together and produced an explosion like nothing it ever had before. "Holy-"

"That was new," I agreed over the metal clanging. "There must be a stronger power source here than in the future."

"I'll still kill you."

"Just keep on dreaming, Kina. You know I'll win this time too. I always do."

"You just don't get it, do you? All of our battles mean nothing- they haven't even happened yet. You're precious Dr. H can't protect you and neither can your armor." She glanced over my shoulder at the same time I felt a strong power behind me.

"Black Lightning Slash!" yelled Kale. Kina followed and both powers came at me. I braced myself, but darkness wrapped around me and I heard only the clatter of my sword hitting the ground before sinking into blackness.

## Chapter 7(Sage)

My armor appeared the instant Synder's did and I was too shocked to attack Kale when she attacked Kina.

"The armors must be connected. When we call ours, yours come too," said Relei, unsheathing her katanas. "Come and get me, warlord bitch. I'll show you the right way to attack this time around."

"Nothing matters this time around. Soldiers, keep the past out of this. I don't have time for their interference."

"Interfere with this!" Relei lunged as the soldiers closed in.

"We have to help them!" said Ryo.

"We can't," I shot back, slicing through a soldier. "Think about it. If that was us- which, technically it is- would you want help?"

"Point taken. But we can at least take care of the warlords we know, right?" said Kento. There was an explosion of dark energy and pain rushed through my armor. I turned and saw Synder fall from an attack by both Corruption armors. "Synder!"

"I got her," I said. "You're mine, Demon of Darkness!" Kina grabbed Synder by the arm and they both vanished. The pain stopped abruptly. "Bring her back!"

"Not this time, Halo," said Kale. "Fight me Ronin trash."

"That had better not be your thoughts about all Ronins, Kale!" Seraan appeared out of nowhere, wielding her yari. "Bring back my best friend, damn you!"

"Such harsh words, girl." Seraan was on the verge of crying and on the verge of screaming, it wasn't that hard to tell. Especially after Kale called her girl.

"I'll show you what a girl is capable of!" she hollered, diving for him. That's when I noticed the blood streaming from her leg. The warlords of venom had beaten her up pretty badly. "I'll kill you!"

"Seraan, you're hurt," I said, catching her arm as Kale vanished and she started to fall.

"Let me go, damn it," she cursed, tearing her arm away. Her eyes reflected a deep pain and they were the sharpest blue I had ever seen. "Don't stop me. I have to do what I have to do."

"Is that something you were raised to believe too?"

"Damn you!" she said harshly. "I wasn't raised believing anything except what I've told myself... I wasn't raised at all other than by myself and my friends. \*That\* is my life and don't act like you know how it feels because not even \*they\* know how it feels." She gestured towards her friends who were in the middle of battle. "It's too different for each of us." The blood had stopped, but she looked pale and uncertain. "I let them take her... that wasn't supposed to happen. I have to get her back. Kina! Show yourself!"

"What do you want, Torrent?" asked Kina coolly, appearing just above our heads. "If you think you can get Halo back, you're wrong. She's ours now, just like Saha."

"Saha..." Seraan trailed off. "How \*dare\* you? It's bad enough to turn him, but now you bring it up after you've kidnapped my best friend. I'm gonna kick your ass, Kina of Darkness."

"Be careful," I muttered, knowing she had Cye's determination. "You're still hurt."

"Shut up, Sage," she murmured with a slight smile. "I'm a big girl, Halo, believe me. Don't test my limits, Kina. You'd be surprised what I'm capable of when I pissed beyond your knowing." Her armor flashed for a second then faded and the blood was gone. I could feel pain again. Synder was near and she was losing her battle.

"I'll find Synder," I told her softly. "Be careful."

"Watch yourself. If Synder's back, then she's \*probably\* not alone. Ten to one, that's where Kale is."

"I can handle the Demon of Darkness." She just shook her head and raised her yari at me.

"You die and I'll hunt your ass down to kill it again," she threatened, her weapon inches from my chest. "I don't know why, but it would really suck for some reason if you died."

"Maybe because Synder wouldn't exist?" She shrugged.

"Maybe."

Chapter 8(Seraan)

No no no! This was not the time to get some puppy love crush on the

past Ronin of Halo. This frankly was not the time to do anything like that even in the slightest. Kina charged at me and Sage. I barley managed not actually stabbing him with my yari from total surprise.

"That's it Kina," I said, a lot calmer then before, but still ticked off. "I've had enough of you and your-. Super Wave Smasher!" I attacked to avoid getting hit by her dark energy. My leg was almost not there and it hurt like nothing else, but that was the least of my problems.

"You still think he can save her?" she asked as Sage disappeared into the army of soldiers.

"He better," I whispered. I didn't want to lose either of them at the moment, but Synder was- is my best friend. Saha was a hard enough blow without her too. And then Sage... no, I had to keep my focus on the battle.

Suddenly, everything disappeared. The soldiers, the warlords, all of it. I froze mid attack as Relei cursed at Anashi.

"Coward!" she shouted. "Get back here and fight me!"

"Chill, Relei," said Trent, lowering her bow. Then she raised it up again and fired her last nocked arrow angrily. "They had better not have hurt Synder."

"Guys..." I whirled around and saw Sage, carrying an unconscious Synder. Her armor was gone and blood dripped down a long gash in her arm. "I healed her the best I could but..."

"Synder!" cried Karya. "No, please, not you too." Her armor faded and she ran over to her. "Synder, please, wake up!"

"Kina..." Relei lowered her katanas and looked away. "I'll kill her, I swear." Synder groaned.

"Let me kill her first, okay?" she mumbled. There was a sigh of relief from everyone in the group, even me. Synder was okay, for the moment. "I'd get more enjoyment out of it then you would."

"Wanna bet?" asked Relei with a small smile. "I beg to differ." Synder started to laugh, then stopped and groaned again. "Headache?"

"Just a \*little\* bit." Everyone else sent their armors away and Sage set Synder back on the ground. "So what did I miss?"

"Not much other then they ran away with their tails between their legs," said Kento. Synder rolled her eyes and turned to Karya.

"Now I know where you get it," she said. "Anytime the warlords run, especially if they're on the verge of winning, there's a problem. A definite problem."

"Anashi ran from the greatest battle in our lives to attack Relei who was on her own and unarmed. Kina ran because the humans were mounting a better attack then hers and Deri's run for the sake of a bigger plan. Suin doesn't run, nor will she ever unless she's losing badly,"

I said. "I don't know about Dais, Kale, and Sekhmet, but I *\*do\** know our warlords and trust me, if they're running, we're dead meat."

## Chapter 9(Cye)

"Seraan, listen..." started Relei, but Seraan waved her hand.

"I shouldn't have yelled. You're right: anything they *\*can\** use, they will. We know that," she said simply. "I just wasn't thinking straight. I'm sorry."

"I'm supposed to be the leader and listen, but I didn't. I'm sorry too."

"Oh god," muttered Trent. "Here we go again."

"What's that mean?" asked Seraan.

"Nothing, never mind," broke in Karya. "This isn't the time to be fighting. We need to figure out what the warlords are up to. As big a cowards as they are, ours mostly, they don't just run from battle and take the soldiers with them. It was like we had never fought."

"We did, believe me," said Synder, sitting up. The ice bag fell into her lap and she pushed wet bangs out of her face. "I hate to ask this, but you don't think they dragged Saha here?" Trent swallowed and looked away. Relei just snarled softly.

"If they have, it's not going to get in my way," she said. Trent got up and walked outside. "Trent, wait a minute." Relei followed her and shut the door.

"What was that all about?" asked Rowen.

"Trent and Saha were really close," explained Seraan. "About three months ago, Anashi and the other three kidnapped him and turned him to the side of the Dynasty. We've seen him all of once since then, but we know he's evil. As much as Trent doesn't want to believe it, she knows it's true and it eats her up."

"Who is Saha? I've heard you talk about him before," I said.

"First of all, his mother, Dr. H, is the scientist who created us," said Karya. "She raised us in addition to Saha. We're all sixteen and we've known each other all our lives, but he was definitely closer with Trent."

"It's a no brainer, Karya," said Synder. "They like each other, but Trent was afraid of our feelings. She didn't want to lose our friendship by getting too close to Saha with us around."

"Oh for the love of- she's insane if she thinks it'll effect us that much," said Seraan. "Sure, I like Saha, but not the way she does. Damn it, that's the stupidest thing she's ever done."

"But why would Saha fighting for the Dynasty be a bad thing?" asked Sage. Seraan got up and walked over to him.

"Are you completely dense?" she asked, leaning over the side of the

couch and getting directly in his face. "The last time we fought Saha, it wasn't even a battle, and we almost lost Trent. Now we've got seven warlords to deal with, in addition to him." She pulled back with a smile at his confusion and disappeared out the door. "I'll be back. I'm going to get a pop." Karya doubled over laughing the instant the door shut.

"I don't know how, or why, she does that, but she does it well," she said between giggles. "You'll have to excuse Seraan, Sage. Occasionally we wonder about her and then she does something like that."

"We know that she's not all there," added Synder. "But she's the best spy we've got."

"Spy?" asked Sage, still uncertain.

"During the war--"

"Back up, Synder," said Karya. "If you're going to tell them what happened *during* the war, why not tell them about the war in general too?" Synder nodded and settled back against the wall.

"The war started because of the Dynasty. Anashi needed hatred, greed, and the like to give her new kingdom power, so she started a war between Earth and some of the colonies in space. The colonies were newly formed, but had large military powers and highly advanced space technology. Any battles in their territory were lost before they started, but on the ground, Anashi was building strength. When we joined the fight, her empire was more than strong enough, but the humans she had convinced to go into darkness were warring on their own, so she couldn't use them. Our only chance to get to her was stopping the war--"

"Dr. H told us about the start and we pieced it together," continued Seraan, who had come in unnoticed. "It was my job to get inside the main Earth base and stop transmissions to Anashi and the Dynasty. Relei did the same with the colonies. Synder and Karya were in charge of keeping the fighting at a stand still and Trent wanted no part in any of it. She hated war and still does, but she's got a reason now. After the transmissions stopped, we were hired by the various sides to retrieve information and assassinate the political superiors. Fortunately, there was no bloodshed. Anashi attacked finally with the Dynasty and everyone joined together to fight her."

"No blood shed..." Karya trailed off, looking out onto the balcony where Trent and Relei were talking. She blinked and shivered. "Sorry. That happens. Sometimes I remember the fighting between the two that Synder and I couldn't stop. It has nothing on slaughter. Slaughter is an understatement. Pointless is more like it."

"There's never a point to war," I said. She smiled softly.

"Of course not. There never has been, nor will there ever be."

Chapter 10(Karya)

I said it before and I'll say it again: Cye is a lot cuter in person. But that's just my opinion.

Relei and Trent came back in, Trent looking like she had been crying, which was understandable. If Saha did show up... we were screwed. We couldn't fight without Trent. Come to think of it, we still can't.

"Let's go get something to eat. Hopefully the warlords can hold their blood lust long enough for us to have some food," said Relei. "And no, Synder, you're not staying. Not since Anashi has a tendency to attack us when we're alone."

"Damn it," cursed Synder, standing up. "I still don't know how you do that."

"Do what? Know what you're thinking? It's a gift." Relei laughed and grabbed her jacket. "Let's go." Seraan set her pop down and followed. I grabbed Synder's arm as she started to take an unsteady step forward.

"Come on, I'll help you," I said. She smiled gratefully and picked up her coat with her free hand. "It's not fun getting the crap beat out of you, is it?"

"Not really, no," she said. "Karya, tell me, what do you think of Kento?" I almost dropped her.

"What do you mean?" I said. We were the last ones in the room and as hungry as I was, Synder was my best friend and she needed my help.

"I mean, he's cute and all, but... he's a bit of an idiot. No offense."

"None taken. I don't know. I guess he's cute, but it's a little weird. When Relei said she was going to save the past, I didn't know we'd get to meet the people who we wouldn't exist without. It's all too bizarre for me."

"Need some help?" asked Kento. Synder paled, but I didn't think they had heard us. I seriously hoped Kento hadn't and I wasn't really worried about Cy, but still...

"Yeah, thanks," I said cheerfully. Synder shot me a look of complete contempt, then smiled at Kento. I knew she was mad at me, but I was being helpful.

"Hurry up!" said Relei, walking into a restaurant. I followed and found her sitting at a table next to Rowen and the others. Remarkably, Seraan was next to Sage, but Trent sat by herself at the end. I could tell she was thinking about Saha, but he wasn't there.

"Heya Trent," I said, sitting next to her. Synder sat across from me and Cy sat next to me. Not that I'm complaining. "What's up?"

"He's here somewhere," she whispered quickly. "I know he is. I didn't tell Relei because she'd freak, you know she would."

"Saha?" I said back. "Here? Not good."



"I'm going to free him, Karya. I promised him I would-"

"Whatever you do, don't get it confused with our real mission, got it? We've still got a job to do and people to protect. They die and so do we." She just nodded and shifted her attention back to the glass of water in front of her. "Hey Synder, how are you feeling?"

"Better. I still have a ripping headache, but it's not so bad."

"What can I get for you?" I didn't even look at the waiter, only at the menu.

"Coke, a burger, fries, and chips," I said. Synder groaned and shook her head.

"No food for me. I'll just have water, thanks." He moved onto Trent. For some reason, her voice came out choked and I looked up. "What is it, Trent?"

"He's close," she murmured, tears in her eyes. "I can sense it. I'm sorry, forgive my holding up everyone. Um, I'll have the chicken salad, I guess." She handed him the menu and turned to her water again.

"Gotcha. Anything to drink?" Now my voice caught in my throat. That voice... no way. I finally looked up and saw a familiar half grin under blue eyes.

"\*You\*!" I hissed. Trent jerked and knocked over her water. "So you \*did\* come."

"Like I'd let you guys have all the fun in the past," he said, sitting in the empty chair next to Trent. She gave another choked noise and he looked at her. "And how are you, Trent?"

"You're here..." she trailed off.

"Of course. You really thought I'd stay back? Oh, Trent, I thought we knew each other better than that. How's your head, Synder?"

"It just got worse," she muttered. "What do you want, Saha?"

"Saha?" said Kento. "But isn't he...?"

"Just chill, Hardrock. I'm here on embassy from Anashi. She says that she'll leave if she gets the Inferno armor of Master Talpa."

"The Inferno?" I asked. "What the hell is that?"

"It's a mega armor you girls haven't figured out yet. But one will work just fine for Master Talpa because getting you five to turn will be a cinch." I jumped up angrily.

"We'll never turn and you shouldn't have either!" I shouted. Relei gasped.

"Saha!" she said.

"Who said you'd do it on your own? We have... our ways, you should know that by now." I heard a light tinkling of glass and he collapsed. Trent stood over him, looking as angry as I had felt. Now I was just stunned.

"\*That\* was for trying to kill Dr. H," she mused. "You're not my friend Saha and until I find him, you are my enemy."

"Go Trent," said Relei. "Come on, we had better get out of here. Thank goodness this place was almost empty." It was true. We had been basically the only customers upon coming in and the only other person had left already. Something was missing though...

"What do we do with him?" asked Rowen.

"We'll take him back to the hotel," suggested Synder. "Even if Anashi does find him, he's ours again now so he won't go far." She got up and brushed water off of her arm. "Maybe there's some way to send him back to Dr. H. I'm sure she'll want to see her son again."

"We can't," said Relei. "And until we regain the strength we had when we came, we can't either. It would be too much of a risk and I'm pretty sure none of us would survive the trip."

"What are you talking about?" asked Ryo.

"The armors brought us here, Sanada, using our own power, and we'll be killed unless we're stronger when we go back."

Chapter 11(Kento)

Karya lifted Saha's shoulders and Cye grabbed his legs.

"We'll take him back to the hotel, hopefully without any meetings with the warlords."

"They don't stand a chance if we do," growled Synder. "I'm gonna pound Kina to dust and Kale too if he tries to get in my way."

"You're still hurt," I pointed out. She flashed me a dangerous smile that looked really great on her.

"Don't try and protect me, Kento, when I'm perfectly capable of protecting myself." Trent managed a chuckle as she followed Cye and Karya.

"I pity whoever tries to protect you," said Relei. "'Cause who's going to protect him?"

"Very funny, Ree. You're one to talk." She cast a half glance at Rowen, to Relei's definite dislike.

"Hush up, Synder," she muttered. "I'm not as dumb as I look either." Synder scowled as Relei walked off.

"What was that all about?" I asked. She coughed and shook her head.

"You can't see it?" she said. "Relei likes Rowen. It's kind of

obvious, when you figure she was quicker to apologize to him then she ever has been with us." Synder shrugged. "I don't know. but let's hurry. If the warlords attack, they'll need our help too."

"But you're hurt," I repeated. She growled and whirled around to face me. Her light blue eyes were cold and angry.

"I know I'm hurt, Hardrock. That doesn't mean to you have to act like my father." She stalked out the door, to my confusion.

"Smooth move, Kento," said Rowen.

"What... just happened?" I asked. Relei grinned.

"Welcome to the wide world of trying to understand us," she said. "Synder has a rule about getting to close and/or being protected by members of the opposite sex i.e. you. She's especially particular about it when she likes that person." She grabbed her jacket and went after Synder.

"Huh?"

## Chapter 12(Saha)

I watched myself through a dark haze. Sometimes I'd see someone I knew, like my mother, but it didn't occur to me who they were. And then, suddenly everything cleared up. I felt Trent hit me in the back of the head and I collapsed.

Hours, days, minutes passed. I didn't know which, but when I opened my eyes, Trent was leaning over me with a bag of ice.

"Oh!" she said. "You're awake. How do you feel?" I tried to sit up, but the blood rushed to my head at the same time she gently pushed me back down. "Just stay put. You're hurt."

"Did... you really hit me in the head?" She grinned, embarrassed.

"Yeah, that was me. Sorry, but I \*had\* to do something." She sat on the edge of the couch next to me and put the ice bag on my head. I couldn't decide whether it made my head hurt worse or less, but I didn't say anything.

"Where am I?"

"1989, our hotel room," she said gently. "Anashi brought you back here when we came to pro- er, um, stop her from destroying the Ronin Warriors." She added that last part as Relei walked in with Synder, Seraan, and Karya.

"They went home. I seriously think we've scared the life out of them," said Seraan. "Hello Saha. Glad you're awake."

"You're all here?" I asked. "But why? And what's going on? I thought you were the Ronins."

"Calm yourself, Sa," said Karya. "We're the Ronins of the future, remember? Not to mention, if they don't exist, neither do we. There's a reason for that and you know it." Oh yeah. We had been friends for

so long that I had almost forgotten what they were. Not that I cared they were clones. They were still cool.

"So this is 1989," I said after a moment. "There isn't a whole lot to it."

"Just wait," said Relei. She pulled me to my feet, much to Trent's dislike and pushed open a pair of doors. They led out onto a balcony over the city and the view, it was amazing. I had never seen anything like it in my life. "Beats the smog covering the landscape, huh?" I just nodded. She left and Trent took her place. I had missed her so much... Even now, she looked incredibly gorgeous.

"It's been awhile," she said softly. "Do you remember when we used to climb Mt. Dojo just to see everything from that high up?" I nodded again. "I bet if we did now, it would be..."

"Beautiful," I finished. She smiled and leaned against the railing with a sigh. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know... how long it would last," she said. "I mean, how long until Anashi turns you again? And it doesn't have to be of your own free will either." I took her hand in mine and touched her cheek lightly.

"I promise that'll I'll do everything I can to keep from turning against you and the rest of the girls. You're everything to me, Trent, you should know that by now." She opened her mouth to speak, but on a whim I kissed her. The silence this produced was broken by various muffled shouts of joy. "What the--"

"It's about time," said Relei, shutting the door behind her and cutting off the yells of the other girls. "I swear Saha, if you hadn't kissed her I would've..."

"Would've what?" said Trent breathlessly. "Better watch it, Relei. I'll kick your ass and you know it." She held up her hands in defeat.

"Alright, alright, I get the idea. Listen, the guys are here. They're going to explain what the Inferno is and why the Dynasty would want it, so move your butts." She grinned wickedly. "Unless, of course, you want to be left alone, which I completely understand." She went back into the room and reshut the door. I shook my head and pulled away from Trent. She laughed and started for the door.

"Saha-" she started, then stopped herself. "Saha... I missed you."

The End

## 2. Default Chapter Title

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In Response, I swear, part two: Expectations and Secrets

Trent brushed a lock on blue hair back out of her face and started on her second sketch that day. Anashi hadn't attacked in some time and

it was a vacation for everyone. Relei was on the balcony, talking with Rowen, Ryo, and Mia, and Kento, Synder, Karya, and Cye were out having lunch. Seraan was down at the pool with Sage and Saha and as much as Trent wanted to be there, it was much cooler in the room.

Her mind wandered. A dozen memories floated through her head, sounds and battles that should have been forgotten. The recollections stopped on a picture of Relei. When had that been? Judging by the pain in her eyes and the gun in her hand...

Hmm. Just after the assassination.

Chapter 1(Seraan)

"Put me down!" Unfortunately, Sage complied and I hit the water on my back. When I resurfaced he and Saha were laughing like idiots. "Guys," I growled. "That wasn't funny."

"On the contrary," said Saha. "It was actually quite funny." I dove back under and grabbed his ankle, then stood up quickly. "Hey-" He was cut off by a large splash. I let his foot drop calmly and turned to Sage.

"Now that was funny," I said. He nodded in agreement as Saha stood up, sputtering. "Get a little wet, Sa?" I asked coyly. "Sorry. Didn't mean to."

"Right," he said angrily. "I'm going back up. Trent wanted to go to a movie tonight and I thought I'd go with her." He stalked off and I raised my hand to stop him, but Sage laid his hand on my wrist.

"If he wants to go, let him go," he said. "Come on, I'll race you." He disappeared beneath the surface and I was torn. Apologize to Saha or spend time with Sage? Oh, god, what had I done to deserve this? Just kidding. Of course I was going to spend time with Sage. Do I look- er, um, sound that dumb?

"Hey, wait up!" I called, following him. There was a tremor in the water just as I caught up to him. "What the-"

"Ten bucks on the Dynasty," he said.

"I don't bet what I know I'm going to lose. So those bastards found us. Amazing. It took them long enough." My bathing suit changed into my sub armor and I pulled myself out of the water. Suddenly something grabbed my arm and hauled me to my feet.

"Be careful," said Sage, dropping my arm. I breathed a sigh of relief that was cut short by the run of soldiers. General and none too few of Anashi's Blacks. "She doesn't give up, does she?"

"Do your warlords give up?" I asked coolly, slamming a soldier into the water. The black smoke mixed with the liquid and turned the surface an oily gray.

"You have a point."

"Get away from me!" someone screamed. A child, only about six, had been caught by a Black. A snarl formed on my lips and I landed a kick

in the soldier's head. "Cye?" asked the kid in confusion.

"Uh-uh," I said. "I'm Seraan."

"Hey Yuli," said Sage. "Good job Seraan. He's a friend of ours."

"You know her?"

"You know him?" I said at the same time. We exchanged a glance and he laughed. "Guess so," I added. "Well, it's nice to meet you, Yuli."

"But Sage, why does she had Cye's sub armor?"

"You explain," I said quickly. "I'm gonna see if they went upstairs and/or are terrorizing other people." I ran towards the elevator and punched the button. About half way up, it stopped dead and shook dangerously. "Son of a--"

"Stupid move, Torrent," said Suin. "You're on my turf now."

"Suin, if your turf is a stalled elevator, then I'd hate to see you fight in too. Armor of Torrent! Dao Shin!" I slammed the bottom of my yari into the roof panel and it popped open. "Here I come, warlord trash." The elevator shaft was dark and dirty and the scraping on the walls was ten to one not the rats.

"Brave words, Zero-Two, but you don't stand a chance against me. You wouldn't dare use your full powers in a building full of innocent lives." Damn it! She knew me too well. I'd have to improvise.

Electricity shot through the cables and the car started rising again. The ceiling rushed down upon me and for a split second, I froze. I couldn't think of anything other than I would be crushed to death. No! No, I wouldn't. Not today. I dropped back into the elevator car, to the surprise of the people standing there when the door opened.

"Um, I was just passing through," I said. "Sorry, wrong floor." I closed the door and sighed in frustration. "You enjoy making my life a living hell, don't you?"

"No, that's more of Deri's area. I just like watching you suffer in pain."

"I'm getting a headache, does that count?"

"Not really." The doors opened again, same floor, only there was no one in the hall. Relei appeared from the door to my left, looking angry and confused.

"What's that warlord bitch want now?" she said coldly.

"Like I know. She's probably here to be a pain in the ass again. They seem to do that well enough."

"We've got to get out of here before someone is-" Anashi slammed into her from across the hall and knocked her back into the room as the

moment Suin chose to appear. "Damn you, Anashi! Armor of Wildfire! Dao Jin!" I heard the others calling their armors too, but my attention was on getting Suin \_out\_ of the building before someone got in the way.

"You're toasted, Suin." I ran into a door and into the room, which was thankfully empty. There was a crash of glass and suddenly Trent was at my side. "Hey, Trent. What's up?"

"We're a having a pest problem next door, and I thought I'd come in here for a break, but apparently the entire building is infested. It's unfortunate too. I was really beginning to like this place."

"Yeah, warlords'll do that. But here's a thought: Why didn't you \_open\_ the door?"

"No reason. It got in my way." Suin faced us with a wicked grin on her face. "What's so funny, Dynasty bitch?"

"You have no idea what you've gotten yourselves into." She unsheathed two of her katanas and a smoke started to fill the room. There was a sour, sharp smell that I recognized almost immediately, but by then, it was too late.

## Chapter 2(Sage)

I ran up the last flight of stairs with Yuli at my heels. Two of the doors had been broken apart and a dark smoke was coming out of one of them.

"Stay there!" shouted Relei. "Don't go anywhere near that!"

"What is it?" asked Yuli. The smoke pulled back and I heard Suin laugh cruelly.

"Of course. I should have known you wouldn't know. Meet the darkness that captured Saha. Right now, since we don't have him anymore, we've got Strata and Torrent as a consolation prize. Enjoy!" There was a clatter of armor and Seraan appeared in the doorway in replace of the smoke, her eyes glittering evilly.

"Seraan?" I asked uncertainly. She raised her yari at me, then her eyes shifted to Yuli. She wavered slightly, then collapsed. "Seraan!"

"Trent, snap out of it!" said Saha, wrenching Trent's hands from his neck. Relei and Rowen grabbed her arms and pinned them behind her.

"Chill, Trent, you'll be fine," said Relei. Trent struggled against her grip.

"The traitor... must die..." she muttered. Synder murmured something and Relei nodded. They switched places quickly and Trent sneered in full contempt at her. "You're a traitor too. You betrayed all of us when you killed that... that \_woman\_." Relei growled angrily.

"How \_dare\_ you bring that up? That's it, Trent, time for you to take a nap!" Her fist connected with Trent's jaw at the same time her

armor started to disappear. The Strata kanji orb dropped to the floor and Relei picked it up. "Excuse me." She vanished back into their room and came out a second later with her backpack. "I, um, I need to take a walk. I'll be back. Synder, can you...?" Synder nodded quietly and Relei headed down the stairs, out of sight. Rowen started to go after her, but Karya caught his arm and shook her head.

"Let her go. It's something only she can deal with," she said softly. "Right now, we have to decide what to do with Seraan and Trent. We can't keep them here, not if Anashi knows this is where we are."

"Let's take them to my house," suggested Mia. "It's in the country and if the warlords attack again, you won't have anybody to worry about getting in the way."

"Except you and Yuli," murmured Ryo. For the first time in a while, Mia glared at him.

"I'm not a child, Ryo," she said. Synder groaned.

"Not again," she muttered, then clapped her hand over her mouth. "Oops. Forget I said that."

"Smooth, Synder," said Karya. "Nice job of covering your ass."

### Chapter 3(Relei)

My head was reeling. Had I over reacted? No, Trent would have said more if I hadn't and that couldn't happen. Oh, why now? Why this? Why couldn't my past just stay that, my past? I fell into a bench in the park and buried my face in my hands. No no no, please, no. I didn't want to remember, please...

My hand reached inside my backpack and closed around cold metal. A breath caught in my throat-

\_The crowd was at least two hundred people thick. Was he insane? I couldn't do it, not with so many people around. No, orders were orders. I had to do this, or risk losing Trent to those bastards.\_

\_ "Peace \_must\_ be an objective for all of us," said the speaker. I knew everything about this woman. Her husband had been a Ronin and her daughter was presumed dead or captured by the Dynasty. What had he said to call it? An act of sympathy. What did this woman have left anyway? Her family was dead and the war was worsening. All talks of peace ended in violence anyway, this was just one more for the papers.\_

\_ I shifted around until I could get a clear shot. \_No remorse\_, I told myself as I pressed down on the trigger. \_Remorse is for the weak.\_

Slowly, I pulled my hand out, gunshots still ringing in my ears. The screams echoed as I turned the weapon over in my hand. It had been three days after that I had found out the one really vile secret about my life: I wasn't a clone. My father had been the Ronin of Wildfire and my mother the speaker I had killed. Not anyone knew, only me and Dr. H.



Tears threatened in my eyes, but I closed them and swallowed. I couldn't break down, not now. There was something seriously wrong with my two best friends and I had to figure out a way to get them back. Saha had been under Suin's power for almost a year, our time, when we had come here. Trent and Seraan had been under about an hour, so there was a big difference. But I didn't have time to let it wear off, none of us did. We were two short and how the connection between the armors would affect Rowen and Cye was beyond me at the moment.

"Hey." I jerked and shoved the thing back in my bag. Rowen didn't notice it, thankfully, as he sat down next to me. "Trent and Seraan are at Mia's. I thought I should find you and tell you before you went back to the hotel."

"Thanks," I said. "Rowen..."

"What's up?" I swallowed more tears and looked up at him. "Relei, what's wrong?" he asked with genuine concern. God, why did he have to be so cute? I could have strangled him for that, but why? Because he wasn't like any other guy I had ever met? Because he actually seemed to care about me?

"I'm such an idiot," I whispered darkly. "I've done things... things I shouldn't have done. What Trent said is true. I have killed, in cold blood. I'm assuming Karya and Synder told you about our part in the war? They don't know, but I was also trained as an assassin."

"Karya said that you had all been hired to assassinate, but no one had died," he said slowly.

"During the war, we lost touch with each other. None of them know what I did, and I don't know what they did other than what they've told me. I killed a peace talker for the colonies on a mission to Earth. The next day, I found out she had been my mother."

"Your mother? But that means..."

"Of course that's what it means!" I said, jumping up. "It means everything, damn it. It means I should have a life, and I don't. It means that I've done the worst crime in the history of man kind and I... don't deserve to wear my armor."

#### Chapter 4(Rowen)

Relei tugged bitterly at her braid and turned around.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I shouldn't have told you that. It's hard enough I have to deal with it on my own, but I didn't have to drag you into it." I grabbed her free hand and pulled her back onto the bench next to me.

"Listen, Relei," I said. "What you've done in the past- you're past, I mean, doesn't have to effect your future. I've seen you fight. There's no other person who deserves that armor and doesn't wear it already." She smiled and shook her head.

"You don't understand. Anything I've done in my past and in this one

\_is\_ affecting my future and the future of the world." I wrapped my arms around her shoulders and kissed her gently. She jerked in shock, then hesitantly kissed me back.

"Does that affect your future?" I asked quietly.

"Are you serious?" she said with a slight laugh. "I'm pretty sure that just screwed everything up." Suddenly, something grabbed her from behind and started to drag her over the bench. She grabbed her backpack, swung it and hit the guy in the head. There was a flash of sunlight on metal and she held the gun level with her chest at her assailant. "I should've known. Koja. You can't stay in one place, can you?"

"Not when my best student's running from her master," he replied with a cocky grin. "You never came back after that last mission, Mia. I was worried." Mia? What?

"I've told you a hundred times not to call me that, Koja. My name from the war has no point now that it's \_over\_. Go back to Feran and tell him I quit. I won't work for you anymore."

"Lord Feran is willing to offer you three times your pay. The war may be over, but the revenge is just starting."

"Then get revenge on this." She pulled the trigger. There was a pop and another noise as it glanced off the tree right next to his head. "Get out of my sight, Koja, or the next one won't miss." He paled and vanished. I realized Relei hadn't moved an inch.

"Ree..." I found myself looking down the barrel of a gun.

"I've worked hard to become cold," she said angrily. "I can't feel, damn it. That just makes me a weak opponent against Anashi. Then you had to come and screw everything up. Why did you have to be so great? Why couldn't you be a jerk like every other guy I've met?" Her hand trembled and tears were streaming down her face.

"Relei," I said softly. "It's okay. You have to calm down. Trent and Seraan need you right now and so do Karya and Synder. They need you to be a leader for them." I lifted my hand and slowly took the gun from her. She let her arm fall back to her side with a weak sob.

"I can't... I won't... Hira... forgive me..." I wrapped my arms around her shoulders and she cried. "Hira..."

"It's okay," I whispered. "It's okay."

"You don't understand," she replied. "Hira was Saha's sister. She was six when we were on a trip and got separated from the rest of the group by Anashi. I tried to protect her but... I promised her I'd destroy the Dynasty and only the Dynasty. Anything else would be pointless."

"It's okay," I repeated. What else could I tell her? I was still too stunned about everything. Like how she could not be a clone and still look a lot like Ryo. "Let's go to Mia's. Synder and Karya are waiting for you."

"Rowen, please, don't tell them," she said. "About anything. I don't

want them to think that... I don't want them to think anything, okay?" She gently took the gun back and turned it over in her hands. "I've got to destroy this thing. You go on ahead. I'll catch up." I nodded and started to walk away. Unseen behind my back, Relei slipped the weapon in her coat pocket. I hadn't really thought she'd destroy it anyway.

"Hey Ree," I said when she caught up to me. "Did you really miss that guy on purpose?"

"Rowen, I promised not to kill anything other than the Dynasty. I broke that promise. You figure it out."

## Chapter 5(Relei)

Saha sat at Trent's side, somewhere between crying and angry. It was about three days after the thing in the park. I still wanted to kill Rowen. But then again, where's the fun in that?

"Hey, Sa," I said, sitting next to him. In all honesty, she didn't look any better. She hadn't woken up and neither had Seraan. It was becoming a trial not to seek out Suin and kill her myself.

"I should've stayed in the Dynasty," he said. "This wouldn't have happened to her if I had."

"Stop it," I ordered. "Blaming yourself isn't going to help any of us. You haven't left this room in three days and you know Trent's going to kill you for it when she wakes up."

"\_If\_ she wakes up."

"Stop it, Saha..." He glared at me, then lowered his head.

"You're right and I know it, but it just seems so hopeless. I know what she's seeing right now. A thousand things she shouldn't. Wars, death, all of it-"

"Saha, what do you think we did for a living?" I asked coolly. "We are children of war, even you. We fought each other in the Colonial Wars, and now we fight the Dynasty. You can't assume because we're girls that we can't handle this kind of thing."

"I didn't-"

"Relei!" shouted Synder. "Hurry up! We've got a problem!"

"What the..." I stood up and looked out of the window. A huge gateway was rising out of the ground and soldiers were pouring out. "Son of a-"

"The Dynasty?" asked Saha. I nodded. "You go. I'll stay here with Trent and Seraan."

"Don't let them catch you if they get to the house. Your life is more important than theirs, even to them, got it?" I didn't see his response. Synder yelled again and I raced downstairs into the backyard. Everyone had gone into the forest to fight the soldiers and I followed, deciding against my armor.

The trees provided great cover for the battles. I could hear the sounds of fighting, but I couldn't see them. Suddenly, three soldiers attacked from above me and pushed me into the dirt. Something sharp cut my lip, but it didn't bleed as badly as I thought it would.

"Get off me, creeps," I said, kicking one away. Another took his place, and then another. This just wasn't my day.

"I wish you wouldn't be so rough with my soldiers." Anashi appeared to my left, fully armored and with an air of contentment. "Are you having fun?"

"What do you want now?" I asked, my fingers closing around my kanji orb. A light glow spread from my hand, forming my sub armor. "Well, Anashi?"

"I want my subjects back. No matter what you do, Strata and Torrent will follow me."

"It isn't good to whine," I said. Another soldier grabbed my arm and twisted it painfully behind me. "What are you really after?"

"Only what belongs to me, Relei Zero-One. Take care of her, but don't lose that armor." I struggled, but something collided with the back of my head and I blacked out to the cold laughter of the soldiers around me...

Voices... a cold wind... why couldn't I move...

"Wake up, Ronin trash." Hard metal slapped me across the face and I jerked in surprise. Or jerked as far as I could with my wrists chained together and to the ceiling above me.

"Wha- what happened? Where am I?"

"You're in the dungeons of his Master Talpa," said the guard, remarkably human and remarkably familiar. "And you're staying here until we receive the armor of Inferno."

"The Inferno..." I trailed off. Of course. Anashi knew I wouldn't call my armor unless I needed it and Trent and Seraan were a good way to distract me from knowing when I needed it. "That bitch... who are you?!"

"It's none of your business," he answered calmly. "You have quite a temper, for a Ronin Warrior."

"I'll show you temper," I growled, my hands wrapping around the chain. The edges sliced into my palms and I grimaced.

"I wouldn't try escaping. The chains have very sharp edges and the floor is definitely not wet with water." He grinned cruelly. "Have fun." Why?! Why did I feel like I knew him?! It was too confusing. My head was reeling with a dozen thoughts, but I couldn't sort through them. Blood dripped down my arms and soaked into my jacket. I closed my eyes and tried to take in a breath, but I was too weak...

Chapter 6(Synder)

The soldiers pulled back quickly. That was definitely not right. My leg collapsed underneath me and Kento caught my arm.

"You okay?" he asked. I nodded and sent my armor away.

"I'll be fine," I said. "Karya, are you alright?"

"As good as I'll ever be after that," she responded. "I'll go see Saha and see what happened." She vanished inside the house and came out a few minutes later, looking confused. "Relei went out to fight, but no one attacked him, Seraan, or Trent." What in the-

"Relei!" I said quickly. "I knew it. It was a trap. That's the only thing it could've been. Suin corrupted Trent and Seraan, leaving Relei's judgment at a stand still."

"Meaning what?" said Rowen.

"Meaning they've got her," said Karya, catching on to what I was saying. "Oh, son of- \_Anashi\_!"

"So perceptive, Hardrock. I wouldn't have thought you were capable of figuring out my plan, even if I did everything short of telling it right to you." The seven warlords appeared, Anashi looked particularly proud of herself. "You know what I want in return for her life. She's enjoying herself in the darkest of Lord Talpa's dungeons under the watchful eye of... while, his name is only important to her at the moment. Two days, Ronins. I'll be back in two days with what's left of Wildfire and I expect the Inferno to be laid at my feet, got it?" She vanished, as did the rest of them. I released my strangle hold on Kento's hand and fought off tears. Oh, god, \_Relei\_. What were we going to do? We couldn't turn over the Inferno, no matter what. It was the last hope the mortal realm had and if the Dynasty had it, the future was altered beyond knowing. The Ronins didn't know they used to destroy Talpa, but Anashi did. And so did we. That's why she wanted it so badly.

"We have to-" started Ryo, but I cut him off.

"That's not an option. Turning over the Inferno armor is the worst possible thing we can do right now. It won't matter once they have it because we won't exist period. Talpa won't keep you alive and from there, it's pretty damn obvious. Not to mention the world's over if they have it." Karya touched my arm gently. "We have to get Trent and Seraan out of whatever hell they're in. Then we'll worry about Relei." I took a deep breath and walked inside the house. Saha was still upstairs, but he glanced at me nervously. "Is there anyway to get them up?"

"Not without their armors and Relei has those."

"Shit!" I yelled. "The Dynasty has Relei."

"What?!"

"I know, I know," I said, sinking into the chair next to him. "We're toasted."

Chapter 7(Relei)

Another cold hit sent my senses into over drive. I felt pain in my hands, but they weren't bleeding anymore. Every part of me ached and I bit back a hurt whimper. I had to be stronger than them, especially now.

"Here." I opened my eyes and saw the guard holding out a glass of water. My vision cleared as I shook my head. I still felt really weak, but the water restored some of my strength and my voice.

"Who are you?" I asked again as he went back to the door. "Why are you doing this to me?"

"That's a dumb question," he said. "You killed the one person I loved and my family too. You deserve this pain because it's nothing like what I felt, finding out my wife had been shot and my daughter was a casualty of war." My brain was too fogged to think. I had only shot one person in my entire life... Then it hit me.

"Of course," I whispered, my head falling back down. "Of course. This is Anashi's revenge for the years I've been kicking her ass."

"What are you talking about?" Didn't he get it? No, no he didn't. No one other than Dr. H and Rowen knew. Even he couldn't know, despite everything.

"I've done hundreds of bad things, but such are the faults of war. I betrayed my friends and killed my own family, all I had left. My father was a casualty of the worst battle through the entire Colonial Wars and it wasn't even considered part of that. I was given the job of destroying a peace talker capable of stopping the fighting. It was the only part I regret and don't at the same time. I don't regret it because it brought me here, to this time where I've met the best people for this and started over. But I regret it because I never got to tell my mother... good bye."

"Your... mother..." He sat down in a chair, his head in his hands. "No, it's a lie. She died. I saw her. Anashi showed me..."

"Anashi is part of the Dynasty. The Dynasty both of us were born to protect," I said. "She leads the warlords of Illusion and Corruption. Do you really think that that was real?" He stood back up, slowly, and faced me. His eyes were a cold blue, glittering with angry tears.

"You're a liar," he spat. "And you'll pay for this. I don't care what Anashi ordered. I'll keep you alive long enough to see your friends fall, then I will kill you like you killed my family."

## Chapter 8(Karya)

We faced Anashi and the other warlords. She threw Relei onto the ground. Ree didn't move and was barely breathing as far as I could see. \_Let this work,\_ I begged. \_Please. It's our only hope.\_

"Rowen," said Ryo, motioning towards her. Rowen stepped forward and picked her up gently. "Is it her?"

"Yeah, but she's not going to last long," he answered. "Ryo..."

"Just stay with it," I whispered as he handed her to me. "And watch her. Are we ready?" They nodded. "Okay. We'll be here for backup."

"Armor of Torrent! Dao Shin!"

"Halo! Dao Chi!"

"Hardrock! Dao Gi!"

"Strata! Dao Inochi!"

"Wildfire! Dao Jin!" Relei started yelling in pain as her armor formed around her. Her eyes opened and she glanced at me in full surprise.

"Just hold on," I said. "Stay with us. You'll be okay." She stood up and looked around.

"How did I get here?" she asked. "What the-"

"Calm down," said Synder. "Just calm down-"

"You tricked me!" screamed Anashi. "You tricked me! Soldiers! Attack!" Hundreds of soldiers suddenly surrounded us. Relei unsheathed her katanas, then wavered slightly.

"I got your back," I said. "Be careful."

"I'll kill her..." she said. "Karya, watch it!" She dove into some soldiers and they hit the side of a truck. It tipped over from the force and exploded in a burst of flames.

"Relei!" My breath stopped. I knew any other time, she could have survived. After all, she had her armor on and it drew its power from fire, but the power would overpower her. She was too weak to handle it. "Oh, god..."

## Chapter 9(Relei)

Half of me knew I would die if I fought, and the other half saw the soldiers barreling towards Karya. I hit the first one without thinking about the fact I was holding my katanas. There was a loud crash and then flames burst into life. Energy ran through me with such force I collapsed against the burning wreckage of whatever I had run into. I couldn't take much more...

"Don't give in, Relei." I opened my eyes slowly. He was there, in a small section of unburning ground. "You have a stronger armor. You'll be safer if you use it."

"You... but why?" I asked, standing up.

"You're the hope of the future. I may have lost my wife, but my daughter..." He gave me a small smile as he started to disappear. "She'll always live on in my heart. You freed me, Relei. Now I have to save my friends. Thanks." I closed my eyes and fell to my knees.

"My friends..." I whispered. "I need your help..." A glow surrounded my armor and suddenly, the power tripled. I forced myself to hold on. If I died, I couldn't stop the Dynasty or Anashi and that girl was going eat my katanas if I had my way.

My armor broke apart and my sub armor changed to black. \_What the\_ I didn't have to think of more. Fire wrapped around me and the pain of power subsided as the white armor took the energy. I became aware of the ground beneath me and the sounds of battle. I was alive, but what of my friends? How long would they last? Long enough, I hoped.

Epilogue(Synder)

"Anashi!" The entire fight froze dead stop. I lifted my head and ignored the soldier with half of my nodaochi through him. It had come from the fire and sounded just like Relei, but... "I've watched you destroy my world and now you try to destroy this one. That can't happen and I plan on stopping you." There was a shadow in the flames and I gasped as Relei stepped from them in a white armor. Was that why my armor had been glowing? The Inferno...

"The white armor..." Anashi trailed off angrily. "I'll have that too. Two Infernos will not make Master Talpa happy in the hands of Ronins. But first, I will tear you apart!" She lunged and I took a step forward, but suddenly, Kina got in my way.

"Fight me, Ronin," she said. "Unless your afraid."

"Of you? When that happens, I'll be dead and gone."

"That \_can\_ be arranged."

"You wish." Our nodaochis connected and I saw Sage fighting Kale out of the corner of my eye. At least this time, it would be just me and the evil warlord bitch of Darkness.

The End

End  
file.